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AUDUBON ASSOCIATION OF THE PACIFIC

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Shore-Bird Spots, Past and Present

In view of the increasing population in the Bay Region and the rapid industrialization of the shore line and marshes, this seems an opportune time to note the changes that are taking place. I have just reviewed the September field trip reports and some of the shore bird articles that have appeared in The Gull since 1919 and also have read over many of my notes especially for Alameda.

In the dim past when we first went shore-birding in Alameda and on Bay Farm Island, Fernside was not filled in, Otis Drive did not exist, but there was a sand beach where, if one sat very quietly, Sandpipers and Plovers would feed within arm's length of the motionless birder. Trains ran down to the mole and along that stretch were pools for Phalaropes. Passengers often spoke of them as "baby gulls." On Bay Farm Island there were no airports, no golf course, no little village of homes, no pond along Maitland Drive, in fact not many roads, and those that did exist were often very dusty or very muddy. A part of the island had been reclaimed for vegetable gardens and hay fields with their accompanying homes. There was a large house with beautiful garden at the west shore. There also was the garbage dump, a fine place to study gulls. The rest was salicornia marsh. Birders wore boots or rubbers. At low tide birds fed along the edges of the many small drainage ditches. Along the south shore, after crossing a band of mud, one could walk on a sandy beach. This was a fine spot for Snowy Plovers and Sanderlings.

1927 the Oakland Municipal Airport was built. The road was improved and birding remained good. At times birds loafed on the airfield. One could park at the extreme southeast turn in the road and watch birds loafing in the salicornia across a slough toward San Leandro. Clapper rails nested in this growth and at low tide would feed at the edges. A small patch of shore was a good place for Knots, Black and Ruddy Turnstones. One of the high lights was a Golden Plover that we watched here for several weeks while it changed into breeding plumage.

In the same year, 1927, the Alameda Golf Course was finished. Several times during the years small breaks occurred in the dike which held back the water of San Francisco Bay from flooding the hay fields opposite the course. After the big break in 1940 the area became a pond. Two years later a dike was built to prevent the water from flowing over Maitland Drive. This pond has become a wonderful bird concentration and feeding ground. During the war an airplane spotter station was maintained at the south end and the region was closed to the public. The pond is also a favorite place for duck hunters who

occasionally, when ducks are scarce, take a shot at the shore birds. The latest development here is the long narrow sand island mentioned in the September 1948 field report. An effort is being made to finance a project for filling in this pond and using the ground for homesites.

When during the war the Oakland Naval Air Station expanded, a stretch of the south shore was filled in. It has been closed to the public ever since. A new beach is beginning to build up but so far few birds occupy same.

The Doolittle Road has been extended to Hegenberger Road. There are several good pools on the south side of the road. Here birds concentrate during high tide. Phalaropes like these pools. They are being filled in with rubbish and will soon disappear. In some cases where land has already been made, top soil has been brought in for lawns where the model airplane enthusiasts hold forth. When the tide is not too high, large waders also loaf on the bay shore side in the grassy islands. A public boat ramp has just been dedicated and speed boats take possession on Saturdays and Sundays. Other improvements are on the program for the entire length of this good shore bird spot. The large loafing areas on dry land on the island are now covered with airfields and buildings. Even the area around the Commerical Radio Range is no longer available. New beaches may form again if the filling in does not extend to the channel. Some businessmen advocate deepening and widening the channel.

Not to be forgotten is the San Leandro beach where we formerly went to see Snowy Plovers and Sanderlings. This place is now almost entirely given over to dumps, garbage and sewerage disposal plants. Birds still loaf in the salicornia that is left.

In Alameda, Fernside still has a fine mud flat and this extends to Bay Farm Island Bridge. The foot of Library St. has been filled in during the past few years and houses stand where we stood to watch birds. A new beach and mud flat is building up, and one can still enjoy the ducks in the Bay. Along Otis Drive much land is being filled in on both sides and houses are being built. The spot in Alameda where in 1944 the first wintering Semipalmated Plovers were observed is now dry land. Up to that year Alviso was the most northern winter station known for this species along our coast. Clapper rails used to frequent the north side of this road. The little pool in which we once found a Holboell Grebe in summer plumage is all but gone. The old Alameda Mole section and much filled in land is now the United States Naval Air Base. A little bit of beach and mud flat exists at the end of Central Ave. Under certain tide conditions when the presence of people does not interfere, Snowy and Semipalmated Plovers can be seen from the street. There is a proposed South Shore Development Plan which may destroy the few remaining good spots between Bay Farm Island Bridge and Washington Park.

Over the years there have been great fluctuations in the numbers of shore birds that come to this region. For the past few years the numbers seem to be on the increase. Whether this means that other feeding and loafing areas have become more restricted or that these birds have really become more plentiful, I am unable to say. During this period the number of Avocets has built up from an occasional one in 1938 to an estimate made a few days ago of 1500. Hudsonian Curlew on the other hand have decreased although this year shows a slight increase again.

It is fortunate that the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology of the University of California is taking an interest in this region. Mr. Robert W. Storer is taking a census on Bay Farm Island. Mr. Storer tries to cover the territory once a week. Several of us are helping him. It is hoped that the survey will continue for at least a year. The next move should be to study the invertebrate life on which these birds depend for food. While on these subjects, I would like to call attention to the very fine article, "Marsh World," by John Thomas Howell in The Gull, vol. 25, No. 10. The endemic species, Suada californica, referred to by Mr. Howell is no longer found at the corner by the Bay Farm Island bridge, but I did find one little piece sticking its head up among some tin cans on the dump. In another few days that clump will disappear. I shall continue to keep looking for other specimens of this plant.

From 1922 to 1930 inclusive the September shore-bird field trip of the Audubon Society was taken to Baumberg near Mt. Eden. Avocets, Black-necked Stilts and I must add White-tailed Kites were the high lights of these outings. Side trips were sometimes made to Dumbarton Bridge and the return route often took us over Bay Farm Island As it became more difficult to obtain permits from the gun clubs which operated in this region and as the salt business developed more extensively we tried El Cerrito, Contra Costa County, in 1931. Beginning in 1932 and continuing to the present year the trips have been taken to Alameda and vicinity. These sometimes included a visit to the shore at the Monarch Box Factory in East Oakland. The foot of 66th Ave. in East Oakland now gives one an opportunity to see some present day loafing grounds.

Some years ago when the Audubon Society went to Burlingame for its February field trips, they were extended to the Mountain View marshes in the afternoon. Here we were almost certain to see Long-billed Curlews and Avocets besides the more usual waders. These marshes have been largely drained and industrial development along the Bay Shore Highway has increased.

The marsh along the Key Route tracks at the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge approach was a good spot to look for Pectoral Sandpipers in August. Warehouses now cover this area.

There are a few other close-by places that I must not fail to mention in this present survey. We have Sears Point Cut-off and shore of San Pablo Bay; Richardson's Bay, Marin County; the Cliff House rocks and south along the Ocean Shore; Hunter's Point and Bay Shore, and the Marina, San Francisco; the approaches to the Dumbarton and San Mateo Bridges; KRE pool, Berkeley Aquatic Park; Albany flats and the entire bay shore including the approach to the San Francisco-Oakland Bay bridge.

Many of the above-mentioned places may change so much that shore birds will no longer be found there but the birds will find other suitable places in the Bay Region or skip this region on their migration flights. The places they do find may not be so convenient for us. I still say that at the present time there is no 'Spot' in the country like Alameda and Bay Farm Island, where so many individuals of so many species of shore birds can be so easily and conveniently observed for so long a period of the year.

JUNEA W. KELLY
Alameda, Cal.
Sept. 20, 1948.

Observations

Edited by JUENA W. KELLY

Ringed Turtle Dove, September 27 & October 7, Berkeley, Minnie H. Young; White-tailed Kite, September 30, near Hopland, Sonoma Co., Ethel E. Richardson; Ruby-crowned Kinglet, October 21, Berkeley, Clelia Paroni.

Exhibit of Paintings

Bird paintings by Harry C. Adamson at Maxwell Galleries, 372 Sutter St., San Francisco, November 11th to 30th, simaltaneously with exhibit in New York, under auspices of The National Audubon Society.

November Meeting

The 374th meeting of the Audubon Association of the Pacific will be held Thursday, November 11th at 8 p. m. in the Oakland Public Museum, Lake Merritt, 14th & Oak Sts. Dr. T. Eric Reynolds, past president, will give "Biographical Sketches of Some Ornithologist, Discoveres of Bird Species." Mrs. Reynolds will report on the New York Audubon Convention. No-host dinner at Zerikotes', Lake Merritt at 6 p. m.

November Field Trip

Sunday, November 14th to Rodeo Lagoon, Marin Co. Take 8:15 a. m. bus to Sausalito at 7th & Mission Sts., S. F. Get off about 100 yards from the north end of the Golden Gate Bridge. Autos meet there at 8:40 a. m. All proceed together in entering and leaving the reservation. This is a most interesting trip of about 2½ miles. Mr. Arthur J. Bennett, Leader. Bring lunch, binoculars and friends.

Audubon Association of the Pacific

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For the Study and the Protection of Birds

Branch of National Audubon Society

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Monthly meetings second Thursday, 7:30 p. m.

Assembly Room, San Francisco Public Library, Larkin and McAllister Sts., San Francisco
Alternate months — Oakland.

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